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Lord Nelson: Master of Command

Michael A. Palmer

Alfred Thayer Mahan termed Lord Nelson “the embodiment of the sea power of Great Britain.”¹ Mahan’s choice for the subtitle of his biography of the victor of Trafalgar reflects a generally held view: that within Nelson could be found all that was right in the Royal Navy—its soul, its philosophy, and all the traits that one embodies. Historians tend to place Nelson among a pantheon of (lesser) heroes: Lords Rodney, Howe, and St. Vincent to name a few.² Nelson is portrayed as a lineal descendant of the men who wore away at the “dead hand” of the *Fighting Instructions*; who pioneered the development and use of advanced signal codes; and who somehow prepared the stage for the great victories of the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar.

Far from being an evolutionary figure, Nelson brought a revolution, however short-lived, to naval warfare. He was not the personification of the Royal Navy in the age of sail, but an aberration. He no more pursued the command methods of Rodney and Howe than he obeyed the signals of Admirals Sir John Jervis at Cape St. Vincent or Sir Hyde Parker at Copenhagen. That anyone should think otherwise is astonishing, for with Nelson’s death on 21 October 1805, his spirit was lost. St. Vincent observed, “there is but one Nelson.” And so it was, the likes of Sam Slick’s “cripple-gaited, one-eyed, one-armed little naval critter” never again walked the quarterdeck of a Royal Navy ship. The Nelson Touch, far from representing the embodiment of anything in the Royal Navy, both lived and died with its namesake.

Nelson’s skill as a naval commander can best be understood within the framework of a modern term, C³—command, control, and communications. While C³ is a recent concept, the processes involved are as timeless as war itself. C³ serves as a useful vehicle to examine command in any era, for the practical realities of method have been too often ignored by historians.

From the sixteenth through the late eighteenth centuries, sailing navies evolved into complex organizations, and systems of command developed accordingly. Ashore, naval bureaucracies grew up to administer the fleets. To command at sea, professional naval officer corps developed, replacing the

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soldiers who first strutted the quarterdecks of the state's ships. To provide for better control, ship types were reduced and standardized, the line ahead formation became the accepted order in battle, and large fleets were broken into divisions, each led by its own flag officer. Given the primitive communications systems available, doctrine developed to provide a common philosophy, for example, the Royal Navy's *Fighting Instructions*, upon which all in the fleet could draw and, expectantly, act in a coordinated fashion.³ Despite advances in the processes of command, by the eve of the American Revolution, battles were becoming increasingly indecisive. Linear formation so restricted maneuver, and the *Fighting Instructions* were so apt to be interpreted differently in the chaos of an engagement, that decisive action seemed impossible.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, visual signalling underwent tremendous development in an effort to bring order to naval engagements.⁴ Evermore detailed systems offered the prospect of direct control to a commander in chief as the signal book replaced the *Fighting Instructions* as his bible. But, in attempting to exercise centralized control over the fleet in battle, Rodney, Howe and others were chasing a chimera. As a result, the balance in the C³ equation became skewed, and communications became a poor substitute for both effective command and control. The great sea battles of the American Revolution and those fought in the early years of the French Revolution remained indecisive. As then Captain Jervis of the *Foudroyant* wrote after the battle of Ushant in 1778: "two fleets of equal force can never produce decisive events, unless they are equally determined to fight it out, or the commander-in-chief of one of them *bitches* it so as to misconduct his line."⁵

On his return to the Caribbean in 1782, Rodney, who had paid little attention to signalling before the fiasco of his April 1780 battle off Martinique, intended to exercise nearly complete centralized control.⁶ At the Saintes on 12 April 1782, Rodney's fleet captured 5 of the 30 French ships of the line engaged. While the action proved a turning point in Great Britain's fortunes and was heralded as a great victory, it was not the annihilative fleet action sought by many; nor was the Glorious First of June 1794, despite its moniker, when "Black Dick" Howe captured or destroyed 7 of the 26 ships he faced.⁷

Both these British victories were fought under centralized control based on signalling. At the Saintes, Rodney's flagships carried a suite of 40 flags and 7 pendants. A century before, 9 flags and a single pendant had sufficed. Inflation in the number of flags and signals, however, led to no more decisive results; nor did the adoption of the numerary system, by 1790, that reduced the number of flags required to 26 and expanded the number of signals in the book to 168.⁸

On 1 June 1794, between 9:24 a.m. when the first ships exchanged fire and 1:30 p.m. when the battle ended, Earl Howe made 14 signals: 8 general to the fleet and 6 to individual ships.⁹ A similar pattern of centralized command was evident at the battle of Cape St. Vincent on 14 February 1797 at which then

Commodore Horatio Nelson, flying his broad pendant in the *Captain* (74 guns), first gained wide popular notice. Admiral Sir John Jervis, with 15 British ships of the line, defeated a Spanish force of 27 of the line, capturing 4 in the process. Jervis, an admirer of Howe's system, armed with a later version of the 1794 signal book, made 23 signals: 10 general and 13 to individual ships between 11:31 a.m. and 4:39 p.m.¹⁰

In each of these British triumphs, centralized control failed to lead to decisive victory. At the Saintes, Rodney maintained control but stripped the initiative from subordinates who believed that greater success could have been achieved had the commander in chief permitted an immediate pursuit of the disordered French. At the Glorious First of June, only 7 of Howe's 26 ships heeded the signal to pass through the French line from windward to leeward, a maneuver designed to prevent disengagement. At Cape St. Vincent, Nelson's decision to wear the *Captain* out of line and support the van, without orders, was, to a great extent, the key to Sir John's success.

Far from embracing the examples of Rodney, Howe, or Jervis, Nelson rejected the notion that the path to decisive victory lay through more centralized control and signalling. His nature, the influence of senior officers, and his own experiences led him towards a decentralized philosophy of command. Nelson's aggressiveness was not an acquired trait. Familiarity with his words and deeds makes clear the man's (almost) ceaseless activity, personal sacrifice, heroism, and sense of duty. Such traits may be refined by others, but they are innate in nature and surely were original dunnage when Nelson, at age 13, first boarded the *Raisable* in December 1770.

As for the impact of Rodney and Howe, Nelson had little to say in his letters regarding the first, maintaining a polite silence that is understandable given Nelson's professional and personal ties to men who believed the Saintes more an opportunity lost than a triumph gained. In an oft-quoted letter to Howe, Nelson termed the victor of 1 June 1794 "the first and greatest Sea-officer the world has ever produced."¹¹ But in a more revealing, less flattering personal letter to the Reverend Dixon Haste, whose young son served under Nelson, he wrote: "Lord Howe certainly is a great Officer in the management of a Fleet, but that is all."¹² Nelson considered the Glorious First of June another Saintes. He wrote his brother in 1794 concerning an impending engagement with a French fleet, "if we only make a Lord Howe's Victory, take a part, and retire into Port, Italy is lost."¹³

The relationship between Jervis, later Earl St. Vincent, and Nelson was warm, close, and based upon mutual respect. But the two men did not see eye-to-eye on every point, particularly methods of leadership. St. Vincent had reservations about Nelson's fitness for high command, believing him to be disordered and impetuous. "All the fear I have about him," St. Vincent wrote, "is that he will tire of being attached to a great fleet, and want to be carrying on a predatory war (which is his *métier*). . . ."¹⁴ While St. Vincent

did not directly criticize his former subordinate's style of command, he did comment on Lord Duncan's victory at Camperdown, a triumph that resembled Trafalgar in form. St. Vincent wrote Viscount Howick, First Lord of the Admiralty: "Lord Duncan's action was fought pell-mell (without plan or system); he was a gallant officer (but had no idea of tactics, and being puzzled with them;) and attacked, without attention to form or order, trusting that the brave example he set would achieve his object, which it did completely."¹⁵ Obviously, disorderly battles fought in a "pell-mell" fashion disturbed St. Vincent, but it was just such an engagement that Nelson sought. After outlining his plan for battle to Captain Richard Goodwin Keats in England in 1805, a plan executed in substance at Trafalgar, Nelson concluded: "It will bring forward a pell-mell Battle, and that is what I want."¹⁶

At Cape St. Vincent, Nelson had witnessed firsthand Sir John's loss of control of the battle. Jervis himself had not been content with the victory, considering himself ill-served by many of his subordinates. Nelson shared his chief's view, writing of his fellow commanders having done "their duty, and some not exactly to my satisfaction. . . . Success hides a multitude of faults."¹⁷

For Nelson, Cape St. Vincent had been his second frustrating fleet action. In March 1795 in the Mediterranean, a British fleet under Vice Admiral William Hotham, who had replaced Admiral Lord Hood, met and drove off a French force. Nelson made the sole capture that day, the *Ça Ira*. He had pressed Hotham to pursue, but the commander in chief replied: "We must be contented, we have done very well." But Nelson was not a man to be contented with marginal results. "Sure I am," he wrote, "had I commanded our Fleet . . . that either the whole French Fleet would have graced my triumph, or I should have been in a confounded scrape." He wrote 2 months later: "truly sorry am I that Lord Hood does not command us: he is a great Officer. . . ."¹⁸

It was Hood, an able, aggressive commander, but a difficult subordinate, to whom Nelson looked for inspiration. He had volunteered his services to Hood in the fall of 1782 at New York, the admiral then about to sail for the West Indies. Nelson preferred command of a line of battleship under Hood in the Caribbean where a fleet action was more likely than service on the American coast where prize money was the major consideration.¹⁹ Nelson, then only 24, though a captain nearly 4 years, obviously impressed Hood. The admiral introduced Nelson to Prince William Henry, noting that "if he wished to ask questions relative to naval tactics . . . [Nelson] would give him as much information as any officer in the fleet."²⁰ Hood treated Nelson as if he were his son. It was in American waters in 1782 and 1783 that Hood and Nelson established a lasting relationship. Hood remained Nelson's patron. He presented his fellow Viscount to the House of Lords when Nelson first took his seat on 29 October 1801.²¹ It was John M'Arthur, former secretary to Hood

and editor of the *Naval Chronicle*, who published the first biography of Nelson in 1809.²² Nelson considered Hood “the greatest Sea-officer I ever knew,” and “the best Officer, taking him altogether, that England has to boast of.”²³

Through Hood, Nelson came into contact with those unsatisfied with the “victory” at the Saintes. Hood had commanded Lord Rodney’s rear division the day of the battle and had been forbidden to chase: Rodney, when pressed, had responded (as would Hotham a decade later to Nelson): “Come, we have done very handsomely as it is.” But Hood believed that immediate pursuit would have netted 20 rather than 6 prizes. No doubt he made such sentiments known to his young subordinate.²⁴

Hood’s views were seconded by another of Nelson’s friends, Captain William Cornwallis, who had commanded the *Canada* in the rear division at the Saintes. He wrote of the battle: “I do not suppose that such an opportunity ever offer’d of destroying so large a naval force, and particularly if it had been followed up at first. . . . I believe there never was a piece of success less talk’d of by those concern’d.”²⁵

That this view became Nelson’s is obvious in a letter he wrote Cornwallis the year before Trafalgar.

I imbibed from you certain sentiments which have greatly assisted me in my Naval career—That we could always beat a Frenchman if we fought him long enough; that the difficulty of getting at them was oftentimes more people’s own fancy than from the difficulty of the undertaking; that people did not know what they could do until they tried, and that it was always to err on the right side to fight.

I was then at that time of life to make the impression which has never been shaken. But, on the score of fighting, I believe, my dear friend, that you have had your full share, and in obtaining the greatest victory, if it had been followed up, that our Country ever saw.²⁶

Nelson’s own experiences in the Mediterranean Fleet under Hotham and Jervis made apparent the shortcomings of attempting centralized control of a battle. Under Hotham, Nelson had been restrained in his exercise of initiative. At Cape St. Vincent, Jervis reputedly resisted calls from his first captain, Robert Calder, to recall the *Captain*.²⁷ In wearing out of line, Nelson had risked his career. Despite his example and his belief that Sir John Jervis would ultimately approve such spirited insubordination, no other captain had been bold enough to imitate Nelson, not even his old friend “Coll,” Captain Cuthbert Collingwood in the *Excellent*.

By May 1798, when then Rear Admiral Nelson entered the Mediterranean, detached from Earl St. Vincent’s fleet, the hero of the St. Valentine’s Day 1797 battle had become convinced of the value of a decentralized approach to command. Basic to Nelson’s method was his rejection of the use of signals as a catholicon for C³ problems. Not that he thought signalling useless; on the contrary, he was in the forefront of its use in the fleet. But he believed that in action, signals would “either be misunderstood, or, if waited for, very probably, from various causes, be impossible for the commander-in-chief to

make."²⁸ Remarkably, in Nelson's two battles fought under independent command, he achieved decisive triumphs without signals. At the Nile, Nelson made two signals after the opening of the engagement: for Captain Thomas Masterman Hardy's *Mutine* brig to pass within hail (a signal that went unheeded) and one general signal to the fleet to engage closer.²⁹ Lest the rear admiral's silence be attributed to the darkness that soon enveloped the two fleets, the same pattern is evident at Trafalgar. After the action began with the combined Franco-Spanish armada, Nelson made but three general signals: "England expects that every man will do his duty," to "prepare to anchor after the close of the day," and to "engage the enemy more closely." Two additional signals were made early to individual ships: to the detached *Africa* to engage closer, and to the *Temeraire*, the ship astern the *Victory* attempting to take the lead, to desist and return to her proper station.³⁰ There can be no comparison between Nelson's use of the signal book at the Nile and Trafalgar with Howe's or Jervis's at the Glorious First of June or Cape St. Vincent.

In lieu of communications, in battle Nelson relied on command and control—his personal leadership and doctrine. This he ultimately came to call the Nelson Touch. In a letter of 1 October 1805, written after rejoining the fleet at Cadiz, he wrote Lady Hamilton: "when I came to explain to them the 'Nelson Touch,' it was like an electric shock. Some shed tears, all approved—'It was new—it was singular—it was simple!'"³¹

Nelson never explained in his letters exactly what the Touch was. Excluding the decisiveness of the result, historians have long noted that most of what he did at Trafalgar was neither new nor singular. The keys to Nelson's Touch were neither his tactics nor his appreciation of the poor fighting quality of his enemies, but his belief that the best way to achieve a decisive victory was to bring the enemy as quickly as possible to close battle, and to give to his subordinates a thorough indoctrination before the engagement, and near-complete initiative once it had begun.

As a leader, Nelson rejected the material means at hand—signals—preferring instead a method based on faith in himself and his subordinates. Perhaps his style was fitting for the son of the rector of Burnham Thorpe in an age when men sought to bring order from chaos and replace beliefs with understandings. But to Nelson, the technical revolution in communications had failed to lead the way to true victory. He sought, in its stead, communion with his subordinates. In the above-quoted letter to Lady Hamilton, the image invoked is religious: like Christ with his disciples at The Last Supper, Nelson gathers his "Band of Brothers" about him to give them his Touch, "like an electric shock," and some cry as his spirit fills them, "and, from Admirals downwards, it was repeated—'It must succeed, if ever they will allow us to get at them! You are, my Lord, surrounded by friends whom you inspire with confidence.' Some may be Judas's; but the majority are certainly much pleased with my commanding them."³² The effect of the Touch was real

enough. Collingwood wrote of his commander after Trafalgar, "everything seemed, as if by enchantment, to prosper under his direction." Captain Edward Codrington wrote his wife, "Lord Nelson is arrived! A sort of general joy has been the consequence. . . ." Codrington noted "the superiority of Lord Nelson in all these social arrangements which bind his captains to their admiral."³³

At such meetings Nelson indoctrinated his subordinates, reviewing the variations an engagement might take, making clear his intentions in each, as well as his expectations of those he led. At a stroke or touch, Nelson supplied a coherent doctrine that would unite all in battle. Simultaneously, by bringing his subordinates into his confidence, he exercised his own leadership, insuring that he would get the most from all. In this he differed markedly from Rodney, Howe, and Jervis who remained detached from those they led.³⁴

Nelson introduced the Touch, although he had yet to so name it, during his pursuit of Vice Admiral François Paul Brueys in the Mediterranean in 1798. Captain Edward Berry noted that for 2 months before the engagement at Aboukir Bay, as the squadron raced back and forth across the Mediterranean in search of the French, Nelson ordered his captains to the flagship *Vanguard* where all became acquainted with his "ideas and intentions . . . by which means signals became almost unnecessary. . . ."³⁵

It was Nelson's method that so astonished Earl Howe himself, who confided to Berry after the Nile: "It stood unparalleled, and singular in this instance, that every captain distinguished himself." But Nelson, in an explanatory letter to Howe, spoke of the "Band of Brothers" he commanded, men united by him and fully cognizant of his wishes.³⁶ At the Nile, Nelson's 13 of the line captured 9 of 13 French liners and burned 2 others.

Nelson's genius lay in his ability to perceive beforehand the forms a battle might take, and to shape for each a plan of action, and then to pass his own understanding to his admirals and captains. As Berry noted after the attack at Aboukir Bay, the plan had been one of several "formed two months before an opportunity presented itself of executing any of them, and the advantage now was, that they were familiar to the understanding of every captain in the fleet."³⁷ Discovering Brueys at anchor, Nelson was able to order an immediate attack despite the approach of nightfall, without the necessity of halting and preparing a plan of battle. The "Band of Brothers" knew what their commander wished done, and their expeditious attack surprised the French and led to their total defeat.

During 1804 and 1805, Nelson likewise developed plans for a battle with the combined Franco-Spanish Fleet. He considered it imperative to launch an expeditious attack, for as he observed to Captain Keats, "No day can be long enough to arrange a couple of fleets and fight a decisive battle according to the old system."³⁸ It was a decisive battle, not another "Lord Howe's

Victory," that Nelson sought. In both his 1803 and 1805 memoranda, and his discussion with Keats, Nelson spoke of the need for speed to achieve decisive results. By making the order of sailing double as the order of battle and by making sure his subordinates knew their missions, as they had at the Nile, before the enemy fleet was contacted, Nelson expected to bring on a general engagement as quickly as possible.

Nelson initially intended to divide his fleet into three divisions, but for a variety of reasons, fought at Trafalgar with two: the lee commanded by Rear Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood and the windward by Nelson himself. Significantly, historians have been more distressed by his alteration in the mode of attack than his captains, a fact that speaks well of the effect of the Nelson Touch.³⁹

Once the battle commenced, Collingwood became an independent commander who had "the entire direction of his line to make the attack upon the enemy, and to follow up the blow until they are captured or destroyed."⁴⁰ Nelson, in his prebattle memoranda, placed no reliance on the use of signals under fire, for communications "from these moments are useless when every man is disposed to do his duty."⁴¹ Nelson's reference here to duty, repeated in telegraphic code in his famous signal made at Trafalgar, is defined in his 1803 memorandum. "The great object is for us to support each other," he wrote, "and to keep close to the enemy and to leeward of him."⁴² That was a commander's duty in battle, and Nelson believed that his subordinates were disposed to act in such a fashion if they were so allowed and not paralyzed in the expectation of signals from their commander in chief. As he reminded his captains in 1805, "in case signals can neither be seen nor perfectly understood, no captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy."⁴³ Here Nelson was repeating a long-held belief, one he attributed to Captain William Locker under whom he had served in the *Lowestoffe* in the Caribbean in 1777 and who had taught the young Nelson, "Lay a Frenchman close, and you will beat him."⁴⁴

Another example of Nelson's lack of faith in signals was his decision to personally lead his division (as did Collingwood) during the approach to battle at Trafalgar, a point for which Mahan took him to task, attributing it to "his ardor for battle." Mahan correctly points out that a commander so situated was at great risk, noting "had any serious injury befallen their person, or the head of the column, the lack of influence would have been seriously felt."⁴⁵ But Mahan misses the point, for Nelson was killed at Trafalgar and his fleet still triumphed. Nelson led, not solely out of ardor, but because he had to decide when to give up the feint on the van and strike the enemy's center. Given his lack of faith in signalling under fire, it was perfectly consistent for Nelson to lead and in that way insure that the proper point was struck at the proper moment. Once that decision was made, his physical presence was superfluous, as his subsequent fate makes clear. His

spirit walked with every admiral and captain on a British quarterdeck that day. That was the whole point of the Nelson Touch.

Nelson recognized that whatever the advances in signalling, he could not simultaneously vanquish both the fog of war and Britain's enemies. Rather than viewing the former as an obstacle to be overcome along the path to victory, he treated it as an ever-present variable that could be made to function as an ally in the pursuit of decisive victory. It is clear from his writings that far from wishing to reduce the effects of the fog of war, Nelson sought to increase its severity. By promptly initiating a sharp, close action, he expected to "surprise and confound the enemy," as he told Keats. "They won't know what I am about. It will bring forward a pell-mell battle, and that is what I want."⁴⁶ By decentralizing his command functions, by indoctrinating his subordinates, by giving them the leeway to act on their own initiative, Nelson believed he could lessen the impact of the chaos of battle on his own fleet while maximizing it on the enemy's. In an engagement fought at close range, amidst great confusion, by ships shrouded in smoke, Nelson was confident his captains would overcome. He treated the fog of war as he did its nearest physical equivalent—the darkness of night. He wrote Howe after the Nile, "I had the happiness to command a Band of Brothers; therefore, night was to my advantage. Each knew his duty, and I was sure each would feel for a French ship."⁴⁷

It is this too often overlooked aspect of Nelson's career that makes him the consummate naval leader in history. His contemporaries and historians have generally portrayed Nelson's tactics as the key to his victories. The Royal Navy attempted to institutionalize his success by including a Trafalgar maneuver, to "cut the enemy's line in the order of sailing in two columns," in a later edition of the signal book.⁴⁸ But the Nelson Touch could not be reduced to a mere signal in a manual, a fact many Royal Navy officers of the period understood. But those wise enough to sense that Nelson's tactics lay not at the heart of his victories, focused just as incorrectly on his aggressiveness. The "go-at-'em" school, which saw in a prompt, violent, headlong attack the secret to Nelson's success, failed to comprehend the accompanying Touch—his leadership and doctrine—that made the effort work.⁴⁹ Against a force on par qualitatively with the Royal Navy, Nelson's pell-mell attack at Trafalgar might well have been defeated. That is not to criticize the man nor diminish the lustre of his triumphs, for central to Nelson's method was his proper assessment of the incapacity of his opponents. However bad they were, the French and Spanish Fleets of the period were large, and neither Rodney, Howe, nor Jervis had been able to achieve more than marginal results. By bringing his entire force to bear as quickly as possible and keeping each subordinate in touch with his intentions through his personal doctrine, Nelson managed to achieve the results that had eluded others.

Moreover, by focusing on Nelson's tactics in battle, rather than on his method of command, historians have lessened the significance of his career. Admirals of the future will find little use in Nelson's evolutions. Task force commanders will never be presented with the opportunity, nor have the need, to break the line of an enemy squadron. But there are important lessons to be learned from Nelson's style of command. In the electronic age there seems to be a tendency in the military to view communications as the panacea for command and control problems, much as the development of numerary signal systems was heralded in Nelson's time. His greatness lay in his balanced approach to command: Nelson's leadership, organization, doctrine, and use of visual communications made him victorious in battle. The Nelson Touch was so successful, his spirit in a sense accompanying every admiral and captain on the quarterdeck, that even his fall failed to alter the course of the day.

Nelson practiced a naval form of what the Germans term *auftragstactic*, a current catchword in the American military. He favored the decentralized over the centralized system of command, as defined in Martin Van Creveld's *Command in War*.⁵⁰ Properly understood, Nelson's career can provide lessons to the modern naval officer. In all probability, whatever the advances in radios, computers, satellites, and sophisticated electronic communications systems, the fog of war will prove as resistant to technological advance as the common cold has to the march of modern medicine. The successful commander in chief will be he who, like Nelson, has remained the leader, the inspirer, the organizer, and the indoctrinator; who, like Nelson, expects his communications to fail him at a critical juncture but who has forged his subordinates into a "Band of Brothers" who will feel for, find, and destroy the enemy.

Notes

1. See Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1897).

2. Geoffrey Bennett, *Nelson: The Commander* (London, England: B.T. Batsford, 1972), pp. 90-91.

3. See Julian S. Corbett, ed., *Fighting Instructions, 1530-1818* (Greenwich, England: Navy Records Society, Royal Navy College, 1905), v. 29 (hereafter cited as Navy Records).

4. L.E. Holland, "The Development of Signalling in the Royal Navy," *Mariner's Mirror*, February 1953, pp. 7-19.

5. John Jervis to George Jackson, 31 July 1778 in Jedediah Stephens Tucker, *Memoirs of Admiral the Right Honorable the Earl of St. Vincent* (London, England: R. Bentley, 1844), v. 1, pp. 67-68; David Hannay, ed., *Letters Written by Sir Samuel Hood (Viscount Hood) in 1781-82-83* (Navy Records, 1895), p. viii.

6. W.M. James, *The British Navy in Adversity: A Study of the War of American Independence* (London, England: Longmans, Green, 1926), pp. 223-224; David Spinney, *Rodney* (London, England: Allen & Unwin, 1969), pp. 321-329, 389-412; Lord Rodney to Lord Sandwich, 26 April 1780 in G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owens, eds., *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich: First Lord of the Admiralty, 1771-1782* (Navy Records, 1932-38), v. 3, pp. 211-212.

7. See Oliver Warner, *The Glorious First of June* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

8. Holland, pp. 6-7; T. Sturges Jackson, ed., *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794-1805* (Navy Records, 1899-1900), v. 1 after p. 8, 9-20.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-51. According to the account of Sir Edward Codrington, then a lieutenant in the *Queen Charlotte*, Lord Howe's flagship, Howe remarked to his assembled officers after making the signal for the

fleet to pass through the French line, "Now gentlemen, no more book, no more signals." Either the story is apocryphal, or Howe soon changed his mind. See Jane Bouchier, *Memoir of the Life of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington* (London, England: Longmans, Green, 1873), v. 1, p. 31.

10. Christopher Lloyd, *St. Vincent & Camperdown* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 29-93; Corbett, ed., p. 254; Jackson, ed., v. 1, pp. 207-213.

11. Nelson to Howe, 8 January 1799 in Nicholas Harris Nicolas, ed., *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson* (London, England: H. Colburn, 1845), v. 2, pp. 369-371.

12. Nelson to Hoste, 22 June 1795 in Nicolas, ed., pp. 45-46.

13. Nelson to his brother, 26 October 1794 in Nicolas, ed., v. 1, pp. 494-495.

14. St. Vincent to Lord Spencer, 30 November 1800 in H.W. Richmond, ed., *Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer* (Navy Records, 1913-1924), v. 4, p. 21.

15. Observations of St. Vincent on "Clark's Naval Tactics," enclosed with St. Vincent to Viscount Howick, 2 June 1806 in Tucker, v. 2, pp. 281-282.

16. Memorandum of a conversation between Nelson and Keats in Nicolas, ed., v. 7, p. 241n.

17. Nelson to his brother, 6 April 1797 in Nicolas, ed., v. 2, pp. 369-371.

18. Nelson to his wife, 1 April 1795, and Nelson to William Suckling, 7 June 1795 in Nicolas, ed., v. 2, pp. 25-27 and 40-41 respectively.

19. Nelson to his father, 19 October 1782, and Nelson to Locker, 17 November 1782 in Nicolas, ed., v. 1, pp. 67-68 and 68-70 respectively.

20. Nelson to Locker, 25 February 1783 in Nicolas, ed., v. 1, pp. 71-73.

21. Mahan, v. 2, p. 160.

22. See James Stanier Clarke and John M'Arthur, eds., *The Life of Admiral Lord Nelson, K.B., from His Lordship's Manuscripts* (London, England: T. Bensley for T. Cadell and W. Davies in the Strand, and W. Miller, Albermarle St., 1809).

23. Nelson to Hoste, 22 June 1795 in Nicolas, ed., v. 2, pp. 45-46; Nelson to his wife, 20 September 1794 in Nicolas, ed., v. 1, p. 483.

24. Hood to Jackson, 16 April 1782 in Hannay, ed., pp. 101-109.

25. Cornwallis' undated account of the *Saintes* in George Cornwallis-West, *The Life and Letters of Admiral Cornwallis* (London, England: R. Holden & Co., Ltd., 1924), pp. 118-127. In addition to Lord Hood and Cornwallis, Nelson had ties with several others who had fought under Rodney on 12 April 1782. Six of the "Band of Brothers" of the Nile were *Saintes* veterans: Sir James Saumarez, acting captain of the *Russell*; Alexander Ball, lieutenant in the *Formidable*; David Gould, lieutenant in the *Conqueror*; Benjamin Hallowell, acting lieutenant in the *Alfred*; Thomas Foley, lieutenant in the *Prince George*; and Samuel Hood, Lord Hood's cousin, lieutenant in the *Bagfleur*. Saumarez, Foley, Hallowell, and young Hood all profited, as did Nelson, from the patronage of Lord Hood. Another *Saintes* veteran and Hood man with ties to Nelson was William Donnet, Hyde Parker's first captain at Copenhagen and later Nelson's during his 1801 command in the Baltic.

26. Nelson to Cornwallis, 30 December 1804, John Leyland, ed., *Dispatches and Letters Relating to the Blockade of Brest, 1803-1805* (Navy Records, 1899-1902), v. 1, p. xvi.

27. Nelson to his brother, 6 April 1797 in Nicolas, ed., v. 2, pp. 369-371.

28. Nelson's 1803 memorandum in Corbett, ed., pp. 313-316.

29. Jackson, ed., v. 2, pp. 56-59.

30. Great Britain, Admiralty, *Report of a Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Examine and Consider the Evidence Relating to the Tactics Employed by Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar* (London, England: H.M. Stationery Off., 1913), pp. 90-103.

31. Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 1 October 1805 in Nicolas, ed., v. 7, pp. 60-61. From the context, it appears that Nelson had discussed the "Touch" with Lady Hamilton before his departure from England. In a letter to Sir George Rose, written in the *Tory* off Plymouth on 17 September 1805, Nelson wrote: "I will try to have a Motto,—at least it shall be my watch-word, *Touch and Take*." See Nicholas, ed., v. 7, pp. 42-43.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

33. Collingwood to Admiral Sir Thomas Pasley, 16 December 1805 in Nicolas, ed., v. 7, pp. 241-242; Codrington to his wife, 30 September 1805 in Bouchier, v. 1, pp. 51-52.

34. See G.B.M. Mundy, *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney* (London, England: J. Murray, 1830), v. 2, p. 358; Bouchier, p. 12; and W. Clark Russell, *Collingwood* (London, England: Methuen and Co., 1891), pp. 71-74.

35. Captain Berry's narrative in Nicolas, ed., v. 3, pp. 48-56.

36. Nelson's note of Berry's reported conversation with Howe, in Howe to Nelson, 3 October 1798, and Nelson to Howe, 8 January 1799 in Nicolas, ed., v. 3, pp. 84 and 230-231 respectively.

37. Berry's narrative in Nicolas, ed., v. 3, pp. 48-56.

38. Nelson-Keats conversation in Nicolas, ed., v. 7, p. 241n.

39. Corbett, ed., pp. 290-320.

40. Nelson's 9 October 1805 memorandum in Corbett, ed., pp. 317-320.

41. Nelson's 1803 memorandum in Corbett, ed., pp. 313-316.

42. See Corbett. Holding the wind gauge, a position to windward of an opponent, gave to a sailing ship the initiative. Nelson's aim was to use this advantage to force a battle, but upon joining it, to take up a position to leeward, thereby preventing the disengagement of the enemy, and forcing a decision. Howe had attempted to do the same at the Glorious First of June, pp. 313-316.

43. Nelson's 1805 memorandum in Corbett, ed., pp. 317-320.

44. Nelson to Locker, 9 February 1799 in Nicolas, ed., v. 3, p. 260.

45. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Seapower upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1890), p. 353.

46. Nelson-Keats conversation in Nicolas, ed., v. 7, p. 241n.

47. Nelson to Howe in Nicolas, ed., v. 3, pp. 230-231. That Nelson sought simultaneously to increase the chaos of battle while maintaining control over his own subordinates is evident in a letter he wrote in 1801 during the Copenhagen campaign. He wrote: "On occasions we must sometimes have a regular confusion, and that apparent confusion must be the most regular method which could be pursued on the occasion." See Nelson to Troubridge, 29 March 1801 in John Knox Laughton, ed., *The Naval Miscellany* (Navy Records, 1902), v. 1, pp. 424-425.

48. Corbett, ed., p. 342.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 336-338.

50. See Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (New York: Harvard University Press 1985).

